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# Language policy and language teaching for newly arrived immigrant children in Estonia

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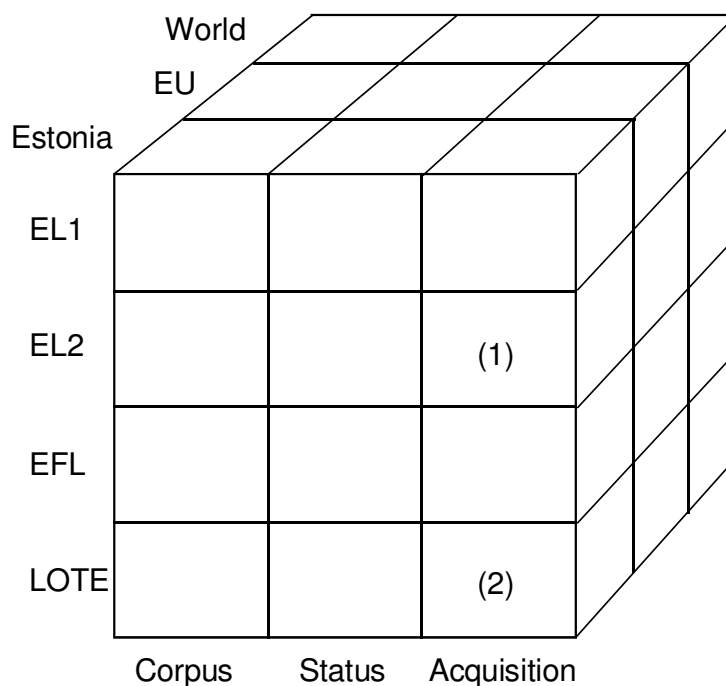
## 1 Introduction

On the first of May 2004 Estonia became a member state of the European Union. As a consequence it had to be ready to implement common rules, norms and legislative regulations. In the field of education the main regulations that had to be implemented is the *Directive of the Council of the European Communities on the schooling of children of migrant workers* of 25 July 1977 (EU Directive 77/486/EEC; henceforth referred to as the Directive). This Directive represents a supranational reaction on a number of demographic changes that were taking place in the nineteen seventies in EU member states as a consequence of mainly economically motivated migration movements. Ongoing labour migration, family reunion, migrant marriages and child births lead to major changes in, among other things, the educational landscape. Hitherto monolingual schools and monolingual teachers were confronted with multilingual pupils with an often limited proficiency in the schools' languages of instruction, being the national languages of the immigration countries. The Directive reacted on this situation by offering to children of migrant workers the teaching of the official language of the host state and the teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin. The conclusion of the 1977 Directive and its implementation through the years in a multitude of member states clearly is an act of language policy, "intended to promote systematic linguistic change in some community of speakers" and "to move the entire society in some direction deemed 'good' or 'useful'" (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997:xi). First and second language teaching to immigrant children implies granting them the right to be taught in these languages and means working towards 'additive bilingualism' (Baker, 2001), which is considered to contribute to school and societal success of these children and as such to creating a 'better' society.

In this contribution we will deal with the Directive and its implementation in Estonia mainly from a language policy and language planning perspective. In doing so it is tried to combine aspects of the origin of the Directive and aspects of its contemporary implementation in Estonia. In Section 2 we will go into the different dimensions of language policy development that can be distinguished in the Directive. Section 3 contains an overview of the policy making process and tries to interpret the Directive within this framework. In Section 4 the Directive is confronted with different visions of language and multilingualism. In Section 5, finally some conclusions are drawn, leading to a plea for including aspects of multiculturalism in the curriculum of all schools.

## 2 Aspects of language policy

The languages, domains and localities that play a role in language policy and planning can be visualised as a cube in which these three different dimensions are combined into a multitude of little cubes, each representing a specific domain of language policy, dealing with a specific language, in a specific locality. This cube was developed as a contribution to a language policy advice regarding the position of Dutch in a European perspective (Smeets, 2002). It is here adapted to the Estonian situation and will be used to discuss some language policy aspects of the Directive.



*Figure 1: Estonian language policy*

Language policy first of all deals with different languages. In this respect, in the case of Estonia at least four (types of) languages can be distinguished (see the vertical axis of the cube). The first is Estonian as a first language (LL1). This language has to be mentioned here because it is the dominant national language in Estonia. It is used in public institutions, it is taught in schools, and a certain knowledge of it is compulsory for getting citizenship. Estonian as the official language of the country constitutes the norm for teaching and learning Estonian as a foreign language (LFL) and a second language (LL2). Estonian as a foreign language, i.e. Estonian as it is taught abroad in situations where the language has no other function than being a school subject, can provide experiences with and examples of didactic approaches and teaching materials that can be adapted in order to be used in second language teaching. The main difference between teaching Estonian as a foreign and as a second language is that in the latter case the language is at the same time taught, and used as a language of communication in society. The fourth language that is included in the cube is in fact a category, not a single language. It refers to languages other than Estonian (LOTE), i.e. the languages of already present ethnic minorities, such as Russians, Belo Russians, Ukrainians, Fins etc., the languages of newly arrived immigrant minorities that have Estonia as their permanent or temporary place of residence, such as refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers, but also to foreign languages like English that have a place in the curriculum in Estonian schools.

The Directive applies to Estonian as the official language of the host state and to the mother tongues (and cultures) of the immigrants' countries of origin. From the above it will be clear that the former in the educational context of the Directive refers to teaching Estonian in a second language didactic approach. As to the languages other than Estonian the Directive is explicitly limited to the mother tongues of newly arriving immigrants. The interesting point here is that some of the languages of newcomers are at the same time the languages of ethnic minorities that already for decades live in Estonia and that are part of the educational system as languages of instruction, the main example being Russian. It can be considered a challenge to try

to establish fruitful mutual relationships between expertise and experiences in these theoretically and historically separated field of language policy.

In language policy handbooks like Cooper (1989) and Kaplan & Baldauf (1997), generally speaking three main types or domains of language planning are distinguished: status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning (see the horizontal axis of the cube). According to Cooper (1989) status planning is about the allocation of functions among a community's languages, corpus planning is about language form, and acquisition planning is about the teaching and learning of languages.

Within this distinction the implementation of the Directive in Estonia first of all represents an example of acquisition planning. It guarantees the teaching of Estonian as a second language and offers pupils whose native language is not the language of instruction at the school the opportunity to learn their native language and to learn about their national culture. The Directive also includes aspects of status planning, since languages are granted the status of being a school subject. For Estonian (as a second language) this might be nothing new, but for the languages of newly arrived immigrants that were not included in the curriculum so far, being taught at school implies a considerable added value, prestige and status. In the implementation of the Directive also corpus planning is involved. In order to be able to teach Estonian as a second language, the corpus of that language has to be made available in a certain form, as in e.g. bilingual dictionaries, grammars, pronunciation guides etc. More or less the same applies for minority languages. Here additional work can be necessary depending on, for example, the level of development of the language in question in terms of its standardisation and codification and the availability of primers, textbooks and other written (teaching) material. Whereas status planning decisions are mainly taken by politicians, the necessary work in the field of acquisition and corpus planning regarding the 'chosen' languages that results from these decisions is generally speaking left to linguists, teachers, teacher trainers, textbook writers and curriculum developers.

The third language policy dimension in the cube is locality. The language policy of any given country can focus on internal as well as external localities. In the case of Estonia, the internal locality, for example, applies to developing language policies for regular education or for acquiring citizenship. The second locality in the cube refers to a European (EU) as well as a global dimension (world). Estonian language policy at a global scale would for example be the financial facilitation of teaching Estonian *extra muros* in universities all over the world. The Directive forms a clear case of Estonia implementing a European language policy at the national level (internal locality).

Summarizing the above, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Directive in Estonia basically involves two different cubes: acquisition planning for Estonian as a second language in Estonia (Figure 1, cube 1) and acquisition planning for other languages than Estonian in Estonia (Figure 1, cube 2). In a broader perspective, also status and corpus planning aspects can be added, leading to four more cubes involved.

### **3 Aspects of language planning**

In an ideal world language policy comes into existence through the so-called policy making process or cycle. In this cycle eight consecutive steps can be distinguished: (1) ideology formation, (2) agenda formation, (3) policy preparation, (4) policy formation, (5) policy implementation, (6) policy evaluation, (7) feedback, and (8) policy termination (Kroon, 2000).

Generally speaking policy can be defined as an answer to a problem. It can be considered as an attempt to solve, diminish or prevent a problem in a certain way,

i.e., by purposive action. A problem, in this context, can be described as a discrepancy between a norm and an impression of an actual or expected situation. What is considered to be a problem and the actual definition of a problem, in other words, heavily depends on the (ethical, social, political, cultural, linguistic etc.) norms that are valued and adhered to by members of a certain society. It goes without saying that the identification and definition of problems as well as the proposals for policy and action to solve these problems can differ a great deal depending of which societal groups - majority or minority, elites or counter elites - take the lead. The identification, definition and prioritising of problems that are suitable for policy development are main activities at the beginning stages of the policy making process, dealing with ideology formation, setting the agenda, preparing the policy, and, finally, writing it up in a policy document. These are the stages in which what Kaplan & Baldauf (1997) call 'language policy' is developed: the body of ideas underlying the intended language change. This agreed upon policy is then implemented, evaluated, adapted and terminated (or continued, of course). This part of the policy cycle is close to Kaplan and Baldauf's 'language planning', the actual execution of the policy.

The relevance of the above distinctions for the implementation of the Directive in Estonia is that the Directive as it was originally meant, is *not per se* an adequate answer to the situation of newly arrived immigrant in contemporary Estonia. The Directive was developed in the nineteen seventies as a language policy and planning instrument reacting on the educational problems caused by massive labour migration movements. As far as Estonia is concerned, the underlying language policy considerations might be in place. In view of the fact, however, that actual migration movements to the country are rather limited and, for the time being, are not likely to lead to the type and scale of problems that Western European states were facing twentyfive years ago, there does not seem to be an urgent and immediate need for large scale language planning measures as were needed in the nineteen seventies.

The point that is highlighted here, is that the implementation of a given policy is more likely to be successful if this policy has been co-produced by the majority and minority groups that are affected by it and reacts on a problem that is really identified, perceived, defined and prioritised as a problem suitable for policy making. The adoption and incorporation into the national Estonian policy system of the Directive is simply a matter of obligation and has not really been open for discussion. It is an example of policy implementation without having gone through the stage of ideology formation, which can be considered decisive in the process of getting the societal support that is necessary for successful implementation.

The above leads to the conclusion that the successful implementation of the Directive at the level of language planning could greatly profit from an ongoing discussion on its adequacy for solving the problems that it was developed to solve in terms of aims, target groups, target languages, didactic approaches etc., and an ongoing readiness to, eventually adapt its implementation to changing circumstances. In the Estonian situation a main issues in this respect seems to be the definition of target groups (in relation to immigration figures). This can be illustrated by referring to the needs of newly arrived or future immigrants to Estonia. As regards newly arriving Western European immigrants from Germany or England, one might for example ask whether they really need or want to learn Estonian as a second language in order to be able to assimilate and have good educational and societal opportunities or simply rely on English as a *lingua franca*, and whether or not they really need or want state support to maintain their mother tongues and cultures through education? Furthermore, as regards old and new Russian immigrants one could ask why the Directive does only apply to the newcomers and not to the former group - formally being and indigenous ethnolinguistic minority in Estonia. And what about refugees and economic immigrants from countries like Chechnya, Afghanistan and a number of former SU republics that are now independent states, who, in their characteristics have more in

common with the original target groups of the Directive than contemporary immigrants from Western European countries. Will they be permanent settlers and ultimately become Estonian citizens, wanting to learn Estonian, or will they simply move to Western Europe as soon as the opportunity arises. Will they want to maintain their mother tongues and cultures, and, if yes, who will be able to develop teaching materials for these languages and teach them. The above also has to do with numbers. In the nineteen seventies Western Europe had to deal with a considerable influx of immigrants that, irrespective of contemporary rhetoric of immigrants as well as governments, came to stay and called for systematic measures in order to prevent these groups from becoming an ethnic underclass of society. In the contemporary Estonian situation, however, not only the number of new immigrants is rather limited, there are also no reliable prognoses as to growth and permanence of stay in this respect. Lackzo et al. (2002; quoted in Broekhof 2003) report the following figures for the years 1998 to 2001.

*Table 1: Immigration to Estonia 1998-2001*

Groups	1998	1999	2000	2001
Asylum seekers	24	21	3	12
Labour migration	456	365	481	(unknown)
Family reunion	585	783	1999	(unknown)

With a population of about 1.5 million it will be clear that for Estonia immigration, at least for the time being, is not a major issue. The brand new refugee camp in Iloka in June 2004 hosted only five refugees. Although, in view of the country's rather strict immigration policy, this is not likely to change in the near future, much will depend on the development of European immigration policies and political and socio-economical developments in countries South-East of Estonia.

#### **4 Visions of language and multilingualism**

The 1977 EU Directive is part of a tradition of international policy making that can be located in the broad field of language and human rights. De Varennes (1996), Trifunovska & De Varennes (2001) and Extra & Gorter (2002) provide extensive historical overviews of international and national activities and documents in this field. In the overview of declarations, treaty's, directives, resolutions, conventions and recommendations given by Extra & Gorter (2002), starting with the United Nations' *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (1948) and ending with the *Declaration of Oegstgeest: Moving away from a monolingual habitus*, concluded at a 2000 Expert Seminar of the European Cultural Foundation, the 1977 EC Directive takes a special position since it not only, as most other texts do, focuses on taking "(...) appropriate measures to promote, in coordination with normal education, teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin (...)" (Article 3) of the children under consideration, but also and at the same time on taking "appropriate measures to ensure that free tuition to facilitate initial reception is offered (...) including, in particular, the teaching (...) of the official language or one of the official languages of the host State" (Article 2), i.e. the country of immigration. Interesting of course is that the teaching of the official language of the host state has to be 'ensured', whereas the teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin (only) has to be promoted. Totally in line with this distinction, the Estonian draft policy document on the education of newly arrived immigrant children uses the words "guarantee" in the case of teaching Estonian and "offer the opportunity" in the case of teaching immigrant languages.

The underlying issue here is a vision of language and multilingualism. According to Baker (2001:368ff) three perspectives can be distinguished: language as a problem,

language as a right and language as a resource. The teaching of the official language of the host country to immigrant minorities is a measure that starts from the language-as-a-problem approach, considering those who only speak the language of their country of origin as having a problem, potentially causing complications and difficulties in personal life, education and society in an immigration situation. This problem can be solved by learning the dominant language, i.e. by integration or assimilation into the majority language and culture. This process often goes hand in hand with less frequently using and finally losing the mother tongue (i.e., 'subtractive bilingualism'; Baker, 2001). Promoting measures for teaching the mother tongue, i.e. the immigrant minority group's own language, on the other hand, takes a rights and/or resource perspective. Language can be considered a basic human right on a personal level, a group level and an international level. Teaching the mother tongues of immigrant minorities as a subject, as stipulated in the Directive, is an example of a language-as-a-right perspective. Immigrant minorities' mother tongues can also be used as a resource in teaching and learning processes: education can start from the principle of children becoming and staying bilingual instead of becoming monolingual speakers of the dominant language.

Following this line of argument the Directive in its origin can be considered a 'rights driven' form of language policy (Ozolins, 2003), aiming to contribute to the emancipation and improvement of the educational and societal position of immigrant minorities and to make Western European countries a more pluralistic, multicultural and multilingual place to be. According to Broekhof (2003), however, Estonian integration policies can be characterised as rather assimilationist, primarily aiming at the establishment and maintenance of a strong and homogeneous nation state with its own national identity and language. One of the main goals of the *State Programme Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007* is linguistic-communicative integration, i.e., integration by learning Estonian (Estonian Government, 2000; quoted by Broekhof, 2003). It will be interesting to see how Estonian integration policies will react on the challenge of immigration growth and the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity that will accompany it. Also in this perspective, the Estonian implementation of the Directive will most probably also in the future be subjected to discussion and revision by the actors involved. It is important to note here that in this revision process a combination of top down and bottom up movements should be guaranteed, i.e. that not only the perspective of the government as the main policy maker, but also the perspectives of teachers as the main policy implementers, and finally the perspectives of newly arrived immigrants as the main target group are included. Without keeping close contact and cooperation with these central actors,, without taking serious their perspectives and experiences in teaching and learning Estonian as a second language and other languages than Estonian, the implementation of process will turn out to be even more difficult than it no doubt already is.

## **5 Concluding remarks**

The above implies a plea for meticulously investigating and monitoring the implementation of the 1977 *Directive of the Council of the European Communities on the schooling of children of migrant workers* in Estonia as an act of language policy and language planning. The main reason for this plea can be found in the obviously an naturally existing distance between the historical 'invention' in the nineteen seventies of the language policy that the Directive represents and the actual implementation of this policy in Estonia in the twenty-first century. From a language planning perspective, this distance could easily lead to frustrating and hampering the execution and success of the Directive in Estonia. This has to be considered an unwanted development. Not far the sake of symbolic European policy making but for

the sake of the school and societal success of the newly arrived immigrant children involved, successful teaching of Estonian as a second language and of languages and cultures other than Estonian is an important language policy goal. It is hoped and expected that the implementation of the Directive in Estonia will lead to a renewed consideration and discussion of its relevance, applicability and implementation to the benefit of also other than only newly arrived immigrant pupils. In this context a plea for explicitly including aspects of multicultural education for all pupils in Estonia as an essential and integral part of the curriculum of primary and secondary schools is a logical and natural step in educational language policy making.

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